



U.S. Immigration  
and Customs  
Enforcement

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# News Release

## **ICE LAUNCHES OPERATION COMMUNITY SHIELD, ARRESTS 103 MS-13 GANG MEMBERS IN SIX MAJOR U.S. CITIES** *Local gang leader apprehended in January*

COLUMBUS, Ohio – U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) today announced the arrest of 103 members of the violent street gang Mara Salvatrucha 13 (MS-13) across the nation as part of a new anti-gang initiative called “Operation Community Shield.”

Late last month, teams of ICE agents working with their federal, state, and local counterparts in the Washington, D.C., Baltimore, New York, Newark, Los Angeles, and Miami metropolitan areas, began arresting MS-13 gang members on a range of criminal and /or administrative charges. One arrest was also made in the Dallas metro area.

The 103 individuals arrested to date are accused of, or have already been convicted for, a wide variety of crimes that include murder, attempted murder, sodomy, assault, narcotics violations, weapons possession, re-entering the United States after deportation, and being in the United States illegally.

“This is a good example of how federal and local law enforcement work together daily in the interest of public safety,” said Brian M. Moskowitz, special agent-in-charge of ICE Investigations in Detroit. “By working with our law enforcement partners, we were able to identify and arrest a violent felon and protect the public.”

Locally, ICE has apprehended a local leader of MS-13. Following a minor traffic accident in January 2005, Columbus Police were able to identify Nelson Flores (“El Mula”), the purported MS-13 local leader. Database checks revealed that he had an outstanding warrant for carrying a concealed weapon. Additional checks by ICE agents concluded that Nelson had previously been deported as an aggravated felon after being convicted of assault with a deadly weapon. The charge stemmed from a drive-by shooting in Nevada.

Operation Community Shield is a nationwide ICE anti-gang initiative designed to disrupt, dismantle, and prosecute violent gang members and their organizations by employing the full range of authorities and investigative tools available to ICE. Under this initiative, ICE is employing its broad immigration authorities (both criminal and administrative) against gang members, as well as its customs authorities in targeting narcotics smuggling, money laundering, and in seeking the forfeiture of assets.

This initiative also involves strong partnerships and cooperation with existing federal, state, and local anti-gang efforts. Such partnerships are essential to the success of the initiative and to ensure officer safety during operations.

ICE will also be working through its 54 Attaché offices overseas to cooperate with foreign governments that are also experiencing gang problems, particularly those in Central America.

The initial target of Operation Community Shield is MS-13, which is one of the largest and most violent street gangs in the United States. The majority of MS-13 members are foreign nationals in this country illegally, making them subject to ICE's criminal and administrative immigration authorities. ICE plans to use these immigration tools to arrest, prosecute, and where appropriate, remove these individuals from the United States. ICE coordinates all deportations with the foreign nations receiving these individuals.

At the same time, many MS-13 members derive income from the sale of illegal drugs and other contraband, making them subject to ICE's counter-drug, financial, and other investigative authorities. Seizure and forfeiture of funds, property, and other illegally derived assets will be another component of the initiative.

Over the coming months, ICE will be using all these tools in a combined fashion with the ultimate goal of crippling MS-13 organizations across the country. Ultimately, Operation Community Shield will also target other violent street gangs.

**#ICE#**

*U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) was established in March 2003 as the largest investigative arm of the Department of Homeland Security. ICE is comprised of five integrated divisions that form a 21st century law enforcement agency with broad responsibilities for a number of key homeland security priorities*